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ABSTRACT

Education is now the largest single enterprise in American Society. Educational employees in 1964 were approximately 3 million of 11.5 million public employees nationally. Principals have an important responsibility in the leadership and direction of such employees. Principals have a critical role to play in ensuring that educational public policy is not determined at a collective bargaining table--they are the key people in this overall bargaining process. Principals are playing an increasingly important role in the financial management of education, including decisionmaking as to program priorities. Principals will ultimately exercise much greater discretion in determining how to reach educational objectives providing they assume their proper role of responsibility for much of educational leadership. (Author)

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The School Board Looks at the Status of the Principal

Some recent data from the United States Office of Education reveals that education is now the nation's largest enterprise. Noting that the high school class of 1974 will be the largest in the nation's history, the office reported that $61.5 billion out of a total of $96.7 billion will be expended for elementary and secondary education. Total expenditures for education now equal 8 per cent of the U.S. gross national product.

These data give one measure of how significant a role education plays in American society. But this significance is somewhat old hat to Pennsylvania secondary school principals who fully recognize the value that the United States and Pennsylvania have placed upon education.

How does this affect the importance of school administrators, especially secondary school principals? Let me give you one further insight into some quantitative comparisons.

A study that I did in 1968 revealed that in 1964, then the latest year for which data was available, some 11.5 million persons were public employes. Educational employes locally employed were approximately 3 million of that total, and state employed educational employes represented about 636,000 persons or a total of more than 3.7 million persons employed in educational nationally. In October 1969, this total had swollen to slightly more than 5 million persons employed in education out of a total

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of 12.7 million public employes. In other words, public employes had increased, over a five-year period, by 1,212,000 persons and education employes had increased about 1.3 million persons. The increase in employes engaged in education during this period more than equalled the total national increase in public employes, meaning that other areas of public employment, combined together, had actually experienced a decrease.

As boring as statistics may sometimes be, the significance of these data is to point up the tremendous responsibility that school management people have for ensuring that local, state and national resources are well managed and fully utilized.

As you can see by these comparisons, educational policy makers and administrators are central figures in how a very large part of public resources are applied for common good.

There are signs that our public is becoming less sympathetic to educational costs that increase faster than the general growth of our economy. In 1950, when the Gross National Product was at a level of about $300 billion, state governments were spending a reported $3.4 billion on education. In 1967, when the GNP had risen to about $790 billion - or a little over two and one-half times its 1950 level, state government spending for education was at a level of $21.2 billion, or almost a seven times increase. I suspect that, in the future, educational managers will have the responsibility to identify those items which lean to cost reduction treatment while still improving the quality and diversity of educational offerings.

You may smile at the suggestion that cost reductions may be achieved while improving the educational program at the same time. But it is predicted this will be a way of life for the future and superintendents and principals will be called upon to devise ways to accomplish this task.

All of these comparisons are given you to try to establish one dimension of the important trust assigned to school administrators, especially secondary school principals.

But in today's educational climate, especially in Pennsylvania, there is an even more critical role that secondary school principals and other school administrators must play.

One of the forces at work on the public service scene today which tends to work against general public interest is collective bargaining by public employes.

Collective bargaining is not a device to determine public policy - not in the field of education nor in any other area of public service. If teachers and other public employes wish to organize and to bargain collectively for economic concerns, they should have the right to do so. However, such a right in no sense implies that general public policy will be decided at the bargaining table. And responsible public officials and their administrators need to recognize the dangers and irresponsibility of such a course of action so that they can ensure that such a thing doesn't happen.

This is especially found in education, where there is still some disposition to diffuse collective bargaining procedures throughout the educational process. School officials have no right to allow collective bargaining to constrain, or impinge upon, the educational opportunities to be provided to children.

Bargaining agents who represent teachers or other public employes do not represent children or the general public. They have a very natural, selfish vested interest to represent, which is appropriate to their role. There is no way however, that they can assume the responsibility that properly befalls a public official, and that is the very essence of a representative form of government. If public officials abandon at the bargaining table their responsibility for public policy determination, the underlying principles of representative government are destroyed.

Look with me at a comment that I made before the Elementary Principals Convention in Pittsburgh in October, 1969 just about one year before our now famous Act 195 came into being.

"Ultimately the key person in collective bargaining in education will be the principal. Despite the fact that much of the discussion that has already taken place on this subject has centered around teacher groups and their relations with school boards and chief school administrators, principals will ultimately bear the brunt of much of the impact of collective bargaining.

Let's look at the collective bargaining role of the principal as an educational leader. Truly, the principal is the instructional leader of the building and children that he serves. As noted before, he is the member of the school management team most directly charged with the responsibility for seeing that his children do receive maximum educational opportunity. He is charged with a major share of the responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of individual teacher performance. Increasingly, he will be responsible for the kind of educational climate that exists in his building as well as being increasingly responsible for the direction of the people he supervises. He will be largely responsible for encouraging and developing new practices and innovations, and will be directly responsible for the implementation of techniques, policies, and practices which have been agreed upon by the school board, the chief school administrator and other members of the administrative staff. And he will be the key force in shielding and protecting subject matter and curriculum from becoming a bargainable matter in this newer pattern in education."

In looking back at those comments in October of 1969 I don't want to claim in any way possession of some kind of prophetic powers. But what has happened since that date surely underlies one of the most troubling and challenging facets of being a secondary school principal. Given these various considerations we have discussed, let's look ahead a little bit to see what kind of future we can speculate about for school administrators, especially secondary school principals.

The financial management aspects of the secondary school principal's future role is likely to become more significant than it has been in the past. This seems inevitable.

As school building complexes have been increased in both size and complexity during the past decade, it has become increasingly evident that some greater degree of decentralized decision making and financial control is imperative if any degree of educational program flexibility is to be retained. It appears almost certain that secondary school principals will increasingly be called upon to make educational program decisions based upon alternative cost considerations.

This dimension of financial management, then, will undoubtedly be a more important attribute of the secondary principal's future role. It seems unlikely that future additional money for education will be as easy to come by as it has been during the past decade, thus making this element of responsibility even more critical than it has been in the past.

Lest principals view with alarm this anticipated future accent on financial management and control by them, let me hasten to add that such concern does not appear warranted. Rather, given appropriate options under greater decentralization of decision making, such an arrangement should enhance the educational leadership of principals.

In this regard, you may be interested to know that PSBA has been carrying on a pilot program for one year with several school districts in order to better determine the present limits of decision making authority of principals and the possible benefits that may accrue

from greater discretion for principals. The results of this pilot project will be released soon, but preliminary data looks rather interesting.

It also appears that the educational leadership role of principals, especially secondary principals, will become more critical in the future. This in no way minimizes the present importance of the direction of faculty, nor takes away from the importance of interaction with students and parents.

The added importance of this role flows from two considerations. If there will be decentralization in decision making and if the principal will have greater responsibility for choosing appropriate alternatives in financial management, then such choices should indeed provide for the principal much more latitude in making decisions directly related to educational programs and how to achieve stated objectives.

Despite the many criticisms that one encounters today about the effectiveness of public schools, and especially high schools, most persons who judge such things on an objective basis will agree that secondary schools are generally doing a competent job given their present constraints and problems.

However, it appears that the educational climate is now right for greater innovation and much greater use of diversified ways of providing excellent secondary education. More use of technology and of cooperative work/study programs are just two examples of things that are worth pursuing.

Especially for secondary school principals where course offerings are usually broad and varied, greater flexibility in the decision making process can have an important effect on the structure of educational programs and services for students. However, such educational leadership can only be properly exercised if the principal's options have not been constrained by the kind of collective bargaining agreement under which he is required to operate. This latter factor, then - the collective bargaining agreement that exists and how it is administered - is the third area of increasingly critical importance for school principals and other administrators.

It does little good to give principals and other administrators greater decision making authority and responsibility in areas of program leadership and financial management if the effect of such moves is nullified by a restrictive collective bargaining agreement. Thus, principals must recognize that their role in helping establish the conditions of a collective bargaining agreement is an important and critical one, as is their role in properly administering the contract once it is negotiated.

It is in this third area of responsibility that the principal's role carries a truly new dimension as it relates to educational opportunities and offerings for students. A proper role in this regard will ensure that the principal can make appropriate program and financial decisions as the circumstances may dictate. Less than a proper role in this area virtually assures that both educational programs and finances will suffer despite good intentions by the principal.

This third area of importance drives home the urgent need for principals to be squarely aligned with concerns for the general public interest. Such an arrangement leaves no room for divided loyalties. It clearly requires of the principal that he carry out his overall responsibilities with certainty and vigor as the key component in an administrative - school management team which is completely dedicated to those things that will produce optimum educational opportunities for students. There is no way that he can achieve the fullness of this future role if he is, in turn, fettered by still other bargaining agreements of his own choice which constrain him personally. Thus, it seems almost obvious that principals, if they are to fulfill the importance of the role now charted for them, cannot tie themselves to anything except full-spirited participation in overall school management.

If you agree with me that principals, especially secondary school principals, are as important to the scheme of public education as these comments seem to suggest, then it would appear that there should be no reason to expect less than a highly successful future in:

- greater discretion in decision making and selection of alternatives in a climate of increased responsibility for financial control;
- greater discretion in determining how to achieve educational objectives in a climate of greater responsibility for educational leadership;
- even greater responsibility for ensuring that educational programs and services under their control do not become constrained by collective bargaining procedures.

All of this, in my view, merely suggests that principals and other administrators have an increasingly important role to play and that they will, if able to fulfill the overall requirements of this role, be richly rewarded in terms of personal satisfaction as well as in hard economic benefits.